DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 402 853 HE 029 779

AUTHOR Oliver, Helen T.
TITLE Voices, Places and Conversations about Service Learning: Making Connections.
PUB DATE Oct 96
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the National Historically Black Colleges and Universities Faculty Development Symposium (Memphis, TN, October 10-13, 1996). For a related document, see HE 029 780.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Black Colleges; *College Role; *College Students; Community Services; *Curriculum Development; Educational Attitudes; Educational Policy; Higher Education; Program Descriptions; *School Community Relationship; *Service Learning; *Student Participation; Student Responsibility
IDENTIFIERS *Rust College MS

ABSTRACT

This paper defines service-learning by college students in the context of institutional purpose, mission, and curriculum while simultaneously defining community and echoing conversations about student service-learning experiences. These issues include: (1) voices--institutional purpose and mission and founding principles; (2) places--the student, the teacher, the classroom, and the community; and (3) conversations--highlights of reflective experiences, "telling the stories". The paper describes the service learning program at Rust College (Mississippi), an historically black college which has a long tradition of community service. It reports that, in 1995, Rust College implemented a service learning program called Developing Responsibility through Education, Affirmation, Mentoring and Service (DREAMS). Thirty Rust students are presently involved in service-learning. Students are required to complete 20 hours of tutoring and mentoring services, keep a daily journal, write a reflective paper on the experience, and make a classroom presentation. (Contains 14 references.) (JLS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 402 853

VOICES, PLACES AND CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SERVICE-LEARNING: MAKING CONNECTIONS

By Dr. Helen T. Oliver
Associate Professor of Education and
Service-Learning Coordinator
Rust College, Holly Springs, MS 38635

(601) 252-8000 Ext. 4090
email: holiver684@aol.com

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Paper presented at the National HBCU Faculty Development Symposium entitled, 'Reaching Out to Make Connections', held October 10-13, 1996.

ED 402 779

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Helen T. Oliver

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC).

"VOICES, PLACES AND CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SERVICE-LEARNING: MAKING CONNECTIONS."

ABSTRACT:

One scholar said this of place...: "Place absorbs our earliest notice and attention, it bestows on us our original awareness; and our critical power springs up from the study of it, and growth of experience inside it...It never really stops informing us...It is by knowing where you stand that you are able to judge where you are...One place comprehended can make us understand other place better. Sense of place gives equilibrium; extended, it is a sense of direction, too." (Eudora Welty).

Lately, I have been trying to connect lessons from those historic voices that speak to the rhetoric ... "I've been there. Done that, now here's how"... guiding principles that we all hope that we live today. The truth is, reaching out to make connections is rooted in philosophical underpinnings for each teacher. Each does an internal dive into the depth of what is of value, to the self, to the student, and to the wider community served.

This proposal seeks to define service-learning in the context of institutional purpose, mission, and curriculum while simultaneously defining community and echoing conversations about service-learning experiences. I invite you to join me in exploring these issues as follows:

I. **Voices:** Institutional Purpose and Mission - Founding principles.

II. **Places:** The student, the teacher, the Classroom, the Community.

III. **Conversations:** Highlights of reflective experiences - "Telling the Stories."

---#---

Submitted By: Dr. Helen Oliver, Associate Professor of Education & Service-Learning Coordinator, Rust College, 150 E. Rust Avenue, Holly Springs, MS 38635. March 15, 1996
Tel: (601) 252-8000 Ext. 4090; Fax: (601) 252-4075/6107; Email: holiver684@aol.com.

Helen T. Oliver, Ph.D.
Rust College
150 E. Rust Avenue
Holly Springs, MS 38635
(601) 252-8000 Ext. 4090

Paper presented at the National
HBCU Faculty Development Symposium
Entitled, 'Reaching Out to Make
Connections', held October 10-13, 1996

VOICES, PLACES AND CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SERVICE-LEARNING: MAKING CONNECTIONS

By Dr. Helen Oliver
Associate professor of Education
and Service-Learning Coordinator
Rust College

One scholar said this of place ..."Place absorbs our earliest notice and attention, it bestows on us our original awareness; and our critical power springs up from the study of it, and growth of experience inside it...It never really stops informing us...It is by knowing where you stand that you are able to judge where you are...One place comprehended can make us understand other places better. Sense of place gives equilibrium; extended, it is a sense of direction, too." (Eudora Welty).

Lately, I have been trying to connect lessons from those historic voices that speak to the rhetoric ... "I've been there. Done that, now here's how"... guiding

More

principles that we all hope we live today. The truth is, reaching out to make connections is rooted in the philosophical underpinnings for each teacher. Each does an internal dive into the depth of what is of value, to the self, to the student, and to the wider community served.

Here, we seek to define service-learning in the context of institutional purpose, mission, and curriculum while simultaneously defining community and echoing conversations about service-learning experiences. Join me in exploring three connected concepts - **voices, places, and conversations** about service-learning as we contemplate transforming the curriculum into a service-learning mode.

VOICES:

The voices of the founders of our institutions, relay messages on vision, truth, and strength of character - those moral and upright standards that make for good citizens in our communities today. These voices enable us to shape a future and to bring hope to our communities.

The concept of voices is predicated on the notion of change. Berelson (1959) in The State of Communication Research, adds his voice by saying:

> "...on the train to progress, we all have seats facing backward. Researchers still have an opportunity to turn around and see where we may be going. If we cannot see far ahead, we may at least be able to describe what Is just ahead or what we are passing by so that we can

More

assist those who are deciding which tickets to purchase" (p.6).

Faculty members who have caught the spirit of service and have integrated the ethic of service, can acknowledge the many obstacles to restructuring the curriculum. Professors who see no relationship between course content and experiential learning must come to see the ethical value of service learning.

Rust College, like many of the HBCUs is premised on those historic voices that speak volumes of how things should be. These colleges were born out of the need to develop an educated citizenry, equipped with skills, appreciations, and insights that will enable individuals to live responsibly. Rust College was founded in Holly Springs, Mississippi in 1866 by the Freedman's Aid Society - northern missionaries of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The criteria for selecting the site were numerous, but essentially it had to be a center of influence. Today, the desire of the school is to forge authentic community partnerships that are mutually beneficial.

Rust College has been accredited since 1970 through the efforts of Dr. William McMillan, its tenth president. But, it was the voice of Reverend A. C. McDonald, the first president of Rust College that said:

> "...It is our aim to do not hot-house work, seeking to hurry students through a college curriculum, as do many mushroom schools in the south, sending them into the battle of life only to disgrace themselves and bring reproach upon the cause of education at large, but to take the

More

by far more difficult and tedious plan of trying to lay well a foundation for a broad, thorough, and practical education, such as shall fit our (students) for long lives of usefulness to themselves, their race, and the church." (Rust College Annual Report, 1989-1990).

The criterion for testing this purpose was the college's motto: "By Their Fruits, Ye Shall Know Them."

As the college's mission has expanded to suit the changing needs of society. The focus has been to cater to the characteristics of the students - their background and culture, the demands and needs of the community; and moral and spiritual influence of the church to which the school is affiliated. The prevailing emphasis is on capable instruction, efficient operation, and concern for the "whole" person.

It was the voice of William McMillan, tenth president of Rust College, that said: "My philosophy is relatively simple. It hinges upon a little verse I learned years ago:"

> "If I can let into some soul a little light;
> If I some pathway, dark and dreary, can render
> bright;
> If I to one person in gloom, can show the sunny side;
> Though no reward I win, I shall be satisfied."

"The essence, he said, is that joy comes to me when I am able to help people find a way to create a path to permanent happiness. I am a people person, regardless of race, religion or nationality." (The Marshall Messenger, 1991).

It is this commitment to promote the total development of our youth that we must

More

translate into a structured liberal arts and pre-professional career curriculum. A curriculum that is coupled with closely monitored and carefully supervised experiential learning opportunities such as service-learning.

As a pedagogy, service-Learning builds on experiential learning theory. It is shaped by education reform principles that encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning. It is inspired by the belief that students learn by doing, and that the academy is fundamentally responsible for preparing students for citizenship.

As a course-based educational experience, students participate in organized service activities that meet identified community needs. Service learning is taught in the classroom by extending learning beyond the classroom and into the community. Students reflect on the service activity to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.

Faculty gain new insight about their teaching goals and methods as they examine the way in which students learn. Students participating in the "lived text" of a community placement, approach their traditional materials with newly awakened enthusiasm and insight. Because the pedagogy addresses divergent learning styles, students often achieve greater mastery of subject matter. Service-learning connects the college with the community in a relationship that is reciprocal and mutually rewarding.

It was the voice of Edgar A. Guest (often repeated by William McMillan) who

More

said: "Live Your Creed" in this way:

> "I'd rather see a sermon than to hear one any day.
> I'd rather one should walk with me than just to show the way;
> The eye is a better pupil and more willing than the ear;
> Advice may be misleading but examples are always clear.
> And the very best of teachers are the ones who live their creeds.
> For to see good put into action is what everybody needs.
> I can soon learn to do it if you'll let me see it done.
> I can watch your had in motion, but your tongue too fast may run.
> And the lectures you deliver may be very fine and true.
> But I'd rather get my lesson by observing what you do.
> For I may misunderstand you and the fine advice you give.
> But there's no misunderstanding how you act and how you live."

The most effective way to teach values according to students is that teachers "have to follow the rules themselves" in order to effectively teach character education (Williams, 1993). The notion of "do as I say, not as I do" does not work. Modeling appropriate behavior in and out of the classroom coupled with quality teaching, an ethic of caring and respect for students as learners, are behaviors that create positive moral climates in the classroom. Without such a climate, we risk graduating future generations of citizens without a sense of the common good, without respect for others and the environment, without tolerance or responsibility. In essence, students cannot learn to value unless they are taught to value.

Beckham (1994) in the prelude to "Service-Learning: Listening To Different Voices," indicates that the primary objective of service-learning is ethical in nature. it is intended to improve unfavorable situations or build on good circumstances in addition

More

to providing a learning experience. Therefore, professors must change in order to recognize the ethical nature of service learning and consciously integrate the ethical aspect of community service into the classroom environment.

Teachers must first define their sense of place in the context of institutional mission, understand their own personal values, the classroom climate they wish to create, the needs of the students, and the needs of the wider community to be served.

PLACES:

Critical to transforming the curriculum into a service-learning mode is an understanding of four places: 1) the culture of the institution - its purpose, population served, and its relationship to the broader community; 2) the personal characteristics of the teacher - attitudes, beliefs, motivations, teaching style and ethic of service; 3) the classroom - student individuality, course content, and classroom environment; and 4) the community - its needs, population, and whether urban or rural.

a) Institution. Every institution has a culture (Bergquist, 1992; Schein, 1985), and a climate (Halpin & Croft, 1963; Stern, 1970). Bergquist (1992) describes four cultures in the academy; collegial, managerial, developmental and negotiating. An understanding of these distinct cultures is essential when seeking to transform the curriculum into a service-learning mode and for measuring the success of curriculum restructuring intended to advance service-learning. Each culture can be understood in the context of its historical roots, its multiple representations in many different aspects

More

of campus life, and its embodiment in actual ongoing campus and community operations. I profess that a reassessment of the institutional climate and culture in light of the emergent service-learning pedagogy will help to form a bridge to the 21st century. Lempert (1995) provides a vision of how to bring about these changes within the constraints of existing resources. It is a vision of using non-traditional strategies to bring about change by unleashing the energies of students, teachers, and society to make learning an adventure and to set the groundwork for healthy societies of the future.

b) Teachers. The personal characteristics of the teacher, attitudes, beliefs and motivations are essential to the implementation and sustenance of service-learning programs. Teaching styles, the willingness to change from a traditional mode to an experiential mode, and an understanding of the ethic of service are also important.. Mission statements in higher education incorporate the threefold function of teaching, research and service. Teachers are responsible for bringing a reality to the mission statement and must commit time, thought and resources to bring life to the mission statement. The values essential to operationalizing or redefining the mission statement is a place. But this sense of place is developmental. Teachers have various motivations and themselves go through a transformation as they negotiate adoption of a new innovation within the institution (Rogers, 1983). Teachers define their sense of place as they develop a relationship with the community through the integration of

service in specific courses.

Faculty members who believe that they can overcome obstacles and make a difference will be the ones to provide leadership for the constructive transformation of the curriculum as it relates to service learning.

c) Classroom. The classroom is the traditional place where learning takes place. However, this place is now being redefined as only one of the places for learning. The classroom is a place where community service is conceptualized, defined, and reflected upon as an integral part of the educational process (Beckham, 1995). It is also a place where an atmosphere of the ethical nature of service is created and nurtured by insightful teachers respectful of student individuality, academic rigor, while creating a nurturing environment.

d) Community. The community is geographic place - with historical roots, population characteristics and social constraints- whether urban or rural. It must be conceptualized as a non-academic place where learning takes place and where service happens and where other activities occur (Beckham, 1995). Historically, communities look toward institutions of higher education to provide support - financial, educational, or human to help them tackle social problems. Historically black colleges and universities have a long tradition of community service, and have served as a cornerstone of support in the communities in which they reside (Jenkins, 1996). Developing authentic community partnerships is essential. Linkages must be mutually

More

beneficial and can serve as a working resource for a participatory action working laboratory, to develop strategies for the advancement and betterment of the community.

In order to develop an empowered community, the college and the community should see themselves as equal places and be willing to share, learn, and grow from each other. Partners can link their resources to create exciting and challenging programs to benefit student learning and for solving community problems.

In defining our own sense of place we get a sense of "placefulness" - a rootedness that helps us determine who we are how to impart our unique gift to students. There needs to be an examination of the values for the individual and for the community that come from having a strong sense of place and then putting this into action through mobilizing student volunteers to complete service learning assignments.

According to Penshaw et al, (1979), in Sense of Place Mississippi, it is often easier to see the spirit of place resulted in human behavior than to define it in precise terms. The spirit of place is not a one-way proposition. What we might call "placefulness" is a complicated reciprocal relationship between all those who participate in that place and the experience that result to which we give a voice. Service-learning embraces two things: the service and the learning and involves the two places - the classroom and the community in partnership. It also involves, in my perception, ourselves as teachers, and the mission of the institution. It also entails reconciliation of the needs of youth, reconciliation of the needs of the nation, and

More

reconciliation of the needs of the "highest human values we know" (Ayers, 1996).

CONVERSATIONS: (Highlights of reflective experiences - "Telling the Stories.")

In 1995, Rust College implemented a Developing Responsibility through Education, Affirmation, Mentoring and Service (DREAMS) project which was funded by the Corporation for National Service. The project tutored 250 kindergarten through fourth grade students in basic reading, writing and quantitative skills by: 1) working in classrooms with high concentrations of low-income students; 2)Mentoring and tutoring in the after-school programs; 3) coordinating service-learning activities for K-4 students; and, 4) involving parents, caretakers and other community members in the work participants do with students. Student volunteers working with Project DREAMS provided academic training and social and cultural experiences to K-4 students and their parents in the Holly Springs and Marshall County School Districts.

Thirty students at Rust College are presently involved in service-learning. Students are required to complete 20 hours tutoring and mentoring services, keep a daily journal, write a reflective paper on the experience, and make a classroom presentation. Following are excerpts from the reflective papers:

Cynthia Lawrence..."This has truly been a great learning experience for me and I plan to encourage other students to participate in the project this year.

Latonya Rayford..."The students will continue to look for you on the days that you are supposed to be there. You become obligated to both the teacher and the student."

More

Brian Ayers..."The program is a success. I think more people should think about how many children's lives they could touch just by being there to say they care, and show that the program can and will be a success with hard working dependable people in it."

Dion Stokes.."From working at the Intermediate School as a Special Education tutor/mentor, I can say that it is a great learning experience. It is worth the time in working with special education students because it gives me the opportunity to become the facilitator of the social and academic development of the students.

Although I am not getting paid for this service, it is Okay. Spending my time wisely in working with students in the public school is better than staying on campus complaining about the lack of campus activities. I always wanted to do something constructive, and this is the way I prefer to do it.

It is in my heart in motivating them to learn and grow in a caring and challenging environment. In my opinion, I will make a weak and ineffective person if I were to just perform this service just to get a grade."

According to Frederick (1996), and Briskin (1996), stories are powerful tools in the classroom. For teachers, stories provide "texts" - thick descriptions - metaphors, visual representations that make the process of teaching and learning visible and

More

concrete. They invite us to look at our experience and make sense of it, to engage in a process of metacognition, and to learn by reflective practice how we teach and how students learn. For students, stories connect their lives, experiences, voices, issues and passions with important course content, themes and issues.

Stories from teachers who have experimented with the integration of service-learning in Introduction to Sociology, and Sociological Theory, indicated that students presented qualitative assessment of their learning stating that the experience expanded their sociological imagination and that they understand the intersection between individual biography and social structure. For example, at least one student sensed the instructional gap between teachers and students in the structural setting of the school.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, I encourage all those involved in the change process of curriculum restructuring on campus to stay connected by pausing to listen to the wisdom of the voices that relay messages of hope in the midst of confusion. To search for, and to define "core" values. To reconcile the need for the highest human values we know and strive to impart those values to students. Also to share individual "specialness" or sense of place; to tell the stories and encourage students to do the same. To continually assess and reassess the needs of the community and to take individual responsibility to get things done. Redefine those places within our control. Create and maintain personal space of solitude so that we may listen to the whispering voices of change that informs the spirit.

-00-

References

Ayers, G. E. (1996). Realizing the potential of service-learning in historically black colleges and universities. Seminar given at LeMoyne Owen College, Memphis, Tennessee.

Beckham, E. (1994). Curriculum Transformation: Prelude. In service-learning: Listening to different voices. FORD/UNCF Community Partnership Project: The College Fund/UNCF.

Berelson, B. (1959). The state of communication research, Public Opinion Quarterly, 23, 1-6.

Bergquist, W. H. (1992). The four cultures of the Academy. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Briskin, A. (1996). The stirring of soul in the workplace. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Frederick, Peter. (1996). The power of stories in the classroom. Wabash College. Presented at the 3rd. National HBCU Faculty Development Symposium, Memphis, Tennessee.

Halpin, A. W. & Croft, D. B. (1963). The organizational climate of schools. Chicago: University of Chicago, Midwest Administration Center.

Lempert, D. H. (1996). Escape from the ivory tower: student adventures in democratic experiential education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Oliver, H. (1993). Adaptation to change: Faculty attitudes toward the use of computers at a historically African-American college in Mississippi. University of Mississippi. Unpublished dissertation.

Seabrook-Jenkins, P. (1996). The power of community partnerships. Expanding Boundaries: Service and Learning. Washington, D.C.: Corporation for National Service.

Schein, E. (1985). Organizational culture and leadership. (2nd ed.) San Francisco. Jossey-Bass.

Stern, G. G. (1970). People in context: measuring person-environment congruence in education and industry. New York: Wiley.

Welty, Eudora. In Prenshaw, P.W. and McKee, J. O. (1979). Sense of Place: Mississippi, Jackson: MS. University Press of Mississippi.

Williams, M. (1993). Actions speak louder than words: what students think. Educational Leadership, 51, 3: 22-23.